



Rabies Fact Sheet

What is rabies?

Rabies is a disease caused by a virus. It results from an exposure to an animal with rabies. Rabies in humans is fatal almost 100% of the time.

Who gets rabies?

Anyone can get rabies after an exposure to a rabid animal. Rabies is spread only when the virus that is in the animal's saliva (mouth) gets into a person's skin by open cuts or wounds or in the mouth or eyes. The chance that rabies infection will occur varies with the type of the contact or "exposure".

What is an exposure to rabies?

There are two types of exposure:

Bite – which is any penetration of the skin by teeth

Non-bite – exposure in which saliva or brain tissue from an animal with rabies gets into any scratch, open wound, eyes, or the mouth.

Casual contact, such as petting a rabid animal, is not considered an exposure

What animals get rabies?

Some animals are more likely to be infected with rabies than others. For example, meat-eating wild animals (especially skunks, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, bobcats and bats) most often get rabies. All domestic animals

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Rabies Fact Sheet

(such as dogs, cats, horses, and cattle) can be infected. Rodents (such as squirrels, hamsters, and mice) and lagomorphs (including rabbits and hares) rarely get rabies.

How can you tell if an animal is rabid?

Although some animals with rabies look and act normal, most will develop one of two distinct forms of the disease.

- “Furious rabies” – in which the infected animal is easily over-excited or angered
- “Dumb rabies” – in which the infected animal quickly becomes paralyzed (has difficulty moving)

Usually, animals become irritable, restless, and nervous. An infected animal may have a tendency to eat unusual things like sticks, straw, stones, and soil. Difficulty in swallowing causes the animal to drool saliva, but a drooling dog is not always a rabid dog.

The only way to tell positively if an animal has rabies is to kill it in a humane manner and test its brain for the rabies virus.

How long can animals spread rabies?

Dogs and cats can spread rabies for up to 10 days before they become ill, as well as during their illness. The amount of time varies for other animals but is usually about 2 weeks.

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Rabies Fact Sheet

What do you do if you are exposed to a rabid animal?

Immediately wash all bite wounds and scratches thoroughly with soap and water and see a doctor as soon as possible. Rabies shots on the day of the exposure are almost always recommended and should include both human rabies immune globulin (RIG) and anti-rabies vaccine.

How can rabies be prevented?

- Vaccination of pets against rabies is the best way to reduce human exposure.
- Avoid contact with all wild animals.
- Do not keep wild animals as pets.
- Control of stray animals can decrease both animal and human exposures to rabies.
- Animals which have had contact with an animal that might have rabies should be reported to a veterinarian.
- Animal bites should be treated by a doctor and reported to the county health department at the time the incident occurs

Revised 06/2019

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